MESSAGE NOTES

Why Church Matters – Part 2 of 5

“God’s Instrument to Help the Poor and Oppressed”

**Matthew 25:31-46**

**Introduction:** Throughout our world, wherever the poor are being fed, clothed, and provided safe drinking water; wherever the sick are being cared for; wherever the oppressed are being ministered to; wherever people are being visited in prison; more often than not it is the Christian Church who is doing the most effective ministry to meet the needs of the poor and oppressed. It is God’s people who are having the most impact by living the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46.

**Insights into Matthew 25:31-46:**

**1. The Sheep and the Goats**

When we understand their characteristics, we realize why Jesus uses this description. People who work with sheep and goats describe sheep as “Stupid”, and goats as being stubborn, self-willed animals. If we look at our own life when we were unbelievers, or when we look at how people in the world live today, do we see characteristics like the goat? As we look at our own life as followers of Jesus, do we see some characteristics of being like a sheep?

Here in Matthew 25 Jesus separates these two groups of people and this is an image to which people back then could relate. Because sheep were more gentle and goats more unruly and rambunctious and upset the sheep, shepherds would often separate the sheep from the goats while they were grazing, and they would certainly be separated at night for sleeping.

**Matthew 25:31-46:**

**2. Jesus’ intended meaning**

At first glance it would seem that what happens to us on the Day of Judgment is going to depend on those daily, little, unknown, unremembered acts of kindness and love that maybe go unnoticed by others, but are important to God. However, while those works are indeed important to God, Jesus is not saying that our works will determine whether we go to heaven or not.

When he addresses those who are called sheep he says in verse 34: *Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.* The phrase *“blessed by my Father”* is not a throwaway line. In his “Sermon on the Mount” recorded in Matthew 5-7, Jesus begins with using the word “blessed” multiple times, and he is describing the characteristics of those who are blessed by God.

In Matthew 25, Jesus is saying that those who are his sheep have allowed God to do a work of love, grace and forgiveness deep in our lives. So we are in a right relationship with God, and blessed by him. That relationship with God is then characterized by acts of kindness and love which flow from our inner nature to those around us who are hurting, sick, poor and disenfranchised. To be a “sheep” means we are God’s instrument of helping poor, oppressed and hurting people. Our good works are the “fruit”, not the “root” of our salvation.

**3. Application to our own life – The Takeaway / Challenge**